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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002421

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STATE FOR WHA, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND WHA/CEN
NSC FOR DAN FISK

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS DAY 4 - STILL NOT
IN THE WINNER'S CIRCLE

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 2414 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Charles A. Ford;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: While progress with the Honduran Supreme Electoral Tribunal's (TSE) official tabulation of the November 27 national elections remains slower than all observers would like, all reports show that counting continues around the clock and without incident. Honduras remains calm. The Embassy's press statement released late afternoon of November 29 about the electoral situation has been well received by the media, though some have taken liberties in reporting what the text stated. Post stays hopeful that President Ricardo Maduro or the TSE will announce a winner in the near future. End Summary.

2. (SBU) PolOffs received confirmation the morning of November 30 that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's (TSE's) sorting warehouse in Tegucigalpa has received 90 percent of the voting tabulations done by electoral tables and expects to have the last 10 percent in by noon November 30, although this could slip to the afternoon. It has been reported, however, that similar to the February 2005 primaries, several hundred electoral tables have problems/irregularities including incomplete or erroneous voting tabulations, particularly for congress. Whether or not this is due to incompetence, honest mistakes, or attempted low-level fraud remains uncertain, as does how and if this will delay the official vote tabulation. To resolve similar problems after the primaries, the voting tables were reconstituted to recount the ballots in order to correctly complete voting tabulations.

3. (SBU) TSE shift work seems to be working effectively, though not speedily. As of approximately 12:15pm on November 30, 44.4 percent of vote counts had been tabulated: 464,414 for Liberal Party presidential candidate Manuel "Mel" Zelaya and 459,093 for National Party presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo. These numbers reflect 85 percent of the ballots from the Department of Francisco Morazan (which includes Tegucigalpa, a heavily National Party city) where Lobo is beating Zelaya 49.25 percent to 44.64 percent. The count also includes 41.88 percent of the ballots from the Department of Cortes (which includes the city of San Pedro Sula, a generally Liberal Party city) where Zelaya is beating Lobo 50.15 percent 43.12 percent. The TSE has also begun to tabulate congressional and mayoral vote counts. (Note: The vote count tabulations for each electoral table include presidential, mayoral, and congressional vote counts all on the same document. End Note.) The TSE has experienced some computer problems delaying tabulation of vote counts. The TSE has established a high level commission with

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representatives of the five parties to study incomplete or incorrect vote counts by individual electoral tables, with the parties using their copies from the tables.

4. (SBU) San Pedro Sula is experiencing its own local set of issues, as well, causing Lobo to visit the city the afternoon of November 29. The municipal electoral tribunal in San Pedro Sula did a tabulation of vote counts in the San Pedro Sula mayoral race and declared November 29 that Liberal Party mayoral candidate Rodolfo Padilla Sunseri had beaten National Party mayoral candidate Arturo "Tucky" Bendana (as predicted in initial exit polls). There were public accusations of fraud related to this process. (There are also reports that the same municipal electoral tribunal may intend to tabulate vote counts from unnamed municipalities in the neighboring Yoro Department.) Tabulations of vote counts by municipal electoral tribunals were not foreseen in TSE pre-election plans based on the new electoral law. TSE officials have told the Embassy that they are instructing the municipal electoral tribunal in San Pedro Sula to cease and desist any tabulations of vote counts and send all electoral materials to Tegucigalpa via the military for official tabulations.

5. (SBU) The Embassy's press statement, released in the late afternoon of November 29, has been received very well by the press in Honduras. While some papers scanned in the press release or printed it verbatim, others, such as El Heraldito,

took liberties with the statement that there are indications that there is a projected winner, and reported on the United States' "tacit endorsement" of Zelaya as the winner. The Embassy and OAS's statements, combined with the Ambassador's meetings with both Lobo and Zelaya the morning of November 29, seem to have helped quiet things down. Although Post continues to receive reports that internal dialogue is occurring within the parties, significantly less reaching out to EmbOffs by National and Liberal Party officials is occurring.

16. (C) Comment: There are rumors that back room wheelings and dealings between the National Party and the Liberal Party to protect National Party figures suspected of corruption are the real culprit behind the reluctance of Lobo and the National Party to concede. Post continues to monitor the TSE's progress carefully and remains hopeful that the

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National Party's private assurance to the Ambassador that they know they lost the presidential election means they will recognize a loss once the TSE's numbers, as expected, show such an occurrence. The question that still remains is when will enough votes have been tabulated for Lobo to officially throw in the towel. The fear is that he will not do so until all votes are in, with some speculation that the National Party (perhaps using the San Pedro Sula situation) will charge fraud to try to prevent a Zelaya victory. End Comment.
Ford